



NEWS RELEASE

UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE WESTERN DISTRICT OF VIRGINIA

John L. Brownlee
United States Attorney

Heidi Coy
Public Affairs Specialist

BB&T Building
310 First Street, S.W., Room 906
Roanoke, Virginia 24011-1935
Phone: (540) 857-2974
FAX: (540) 857-2179

April 19, 2007

LEADER OF LEE COUNTY OXYCODONE DRUG RING PLEADS GUILTY; FACES MINIMUM 20 YEARS IN PRISON

United States Attorney John L. Brownlee announced today that Teresa Annette Ely, a/k/a "Big Momma" and four others pleaded guilty on April 18, 2007 to their roles in an oxycodone distribution ring run by Ely in Lee County. The members of the conspiracy were responsible for selling thousands of oxycodone pills in the Lee County area over the last ten years.

"At Ms. Ely's direction, the members of this conspiracy sold thousands of oxycodone pills on the streets of Lee County for illegal use. Now, because of her criminal conduct, Ms. Ely faces a minimum of 20 years in prison," said United States Attorney John Brownlee. "I commend the hard work of the investigators and prosecutors that have stopped the members of this conspiracy from distributing this drug in Lee County."

Teresa Ely, age 39, of Pennington Gap, Virginia, pleaded guilty to being the leader of a continuing criminal enterprise. Kimberly Roop Homan, age 28, Stacy Renee Homan Bishop, age 26, Jerri Michelle Deskins, age 36, and Leonard Brewer, age 35, all of Pennington Gap, each pleaded guilty to conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute and to distribute oxycodone. Homan and Bishop also pleaded guilty to distribution of oxycodone.

All guilty pleas, except for that of Leonard Brewer, were entered in United States District Court in Abingdon pursuant to written plea agreements. Brewer pleaded guilty without the benefit of a written plea agreement.

"This is another example of what happens when all parts of law enforcement work together as a team. I too want to commend the hard work that was put forth by everyone who worked on this investigation," said ATF Special Agent in Charge Edgar A. Domenech.

Three others involved in the case pleaded guilty in January 2007. Beverly Benfield, age 41, and Jennifer Bryson, age 35, pleaded guilty to distribution of oxycodone and conspiracy to

possess with intent to distribute and to distribute oxycodone. Jerry Stapleton, age 48, pleaded guilty to two counts of aiding and abetting in the distribution of oxycodone, as charged in a two count Information filed in United States District Court on January 9, 2007.

“I am proud that we have taken a major drug dealer off the streets. This is a good example of the success we can achieve when local and federal authorities work in unison. We thank the U.S. Attorney’s Office for allowing us to remain closely involved throughout this entire investigation,” said Gary B. Parsons, Sheriff of Lee County.

The defendants were charged on September 6, 2006 in a 27 count indictment and in a superseding indictment returned on December 19, 2006. The indictment charged Ely with running a continuing criminal enterprise, an organization whose purpose was to distribute oxycodone, with maintaining a residence for the purpose of distributing oxycodone, and with numerous counts of distribution. The indictment charged all nine defendants with conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute and to distribute oxycodone and various counts of distribution of oxycodone.

According to evidence presented by Assistant United States Attorney Jennifer Bockhorst, Ely began dealing in prescription painkillers as early as 1996, dealing primarily in OxyContin beginning around 1997, shortly after the drug came on the market. Initially, Ely obtained pills and took them to others, including Jennifer Bryson, who would sell the pills for her from their own residence. In approximately 2000, Ely allowed a number of her co-defendants to move into her house, where they were provided a small quantity of OxyContin for their own use, cigarettes, and room and board in exchange for helping Ely obtain and sell the pills. Between 2000 and 2005, Benfield, Bishop, Bryson, Homan, Wendling, Brewer, and Deskins all resided at the Ely residence for some period of time and each distributed OxyContin from the residence. The group supplied a steady stream of customers, frequently selling ten or more OxyContin tablets per day. The pills were obtained by Ely and the others from individuals in Ohio and from a number of local suppliers in Lee County, Virginia and nearby communities in Tennessee.

The sentencing date for the defendants will be determined in the near future. Teresa Ely faces a mandatory minimum sentence of 20 years imprisonment and a maximum sentence of life, plus fines and forfeiture of her property. The remaining defendants each face fines and a maximum sentence of 20 years imprisonment for each count of conviction.

The charges were the result of a long-term investigation conducted by the Lee County Sheriff’s Department, the Southwest Regional Drug Task Force, and the Bristol Office of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives. Assistant United States Attorney Jennifer Bockhorst is prosecuting the case.

END